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ABSTRACT

Recent studies in counselor training have focused on the trainee/supervisor relationship, with little empirical research on the supervisor and trainee qualities that may contribute to a successful experience. To explore the supervisor and trainee characteristics that may contribute to high quality training, 40 pairs of trainees and supervisors in the clinical psychology internship program from New York University-Bellevue Medical Center, completed separate evaluation forms designed to rate supervisor and trainee characteristics. Each form contained an overall rating, ratings on three dimensions related to skill level in academic and clinical issues, and ratings on three dimensions related to relationship issues. An analysis of the results showed that supervisors who were responsive to the trainee's interests and needs, were available, and were highly skilled in conceptual issues, were rated most highly. Guiding trainees to relevant clinical literature was negatively correlated with the rating of the supervisor. Trainees who were rated most highly were those who were aware of and willing to discuss reactions to the patients. Trainees' skills in conceptualization and treatment of patients were rated as less important than the relationship. Overall, trainees preferred purist supervisors and supervisors preferred flexible trainees. (BL)

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PSYCHOTHERAPY SUPERVISION: TRAINEE/SUPERVISOR CHARACTERISTICS CORRELATED WITH EVALUATIONS

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PSYCHOTHERAPY SUPERVISION: TRAINEE/SUPERVISOR CHARACTERISTICS CORRELATED WITH EVALUATIONS

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, August, 1983, California, by Sunita Stewart, Ph.D., and Murray Alpert, Ph.D., New York University Medical Center.

Major Purpose: Training in psychotherapy has attracted increasing attention. In the recent literature, there have been a number of journal articles and an edited volume (Hess, 1980) summarizing the state of the art. A move towards describing supervision as an evolving relationship may be discerned in the literature. Hess (1980) states that supervision is "quintessential interpersonal interaction" p. 23). Gaoni and Neumann (1974) point out that the appropriate focus of supervision depends on the stage of the relationship. Initially it is didactic with a focus on the acquisition of technique. Later the focus changes to the supervisee's experience in therapy and reactions to the client. Greenberg (1980) similarly highlights the relationship aspect of the supervisory process, stating that its success depends upon the willingness of each member to contract around the focus.

Empirical studies are scant. We were unable to find data on basic questions such as the qualities of supervisor's and trainees that relate to a successful experience. Lambert (1980) concludes in his review of the empirical research that there is little data in this area, and points to the importance of studying the process in advanced trainees, and particularly at considering the interactions between supervisor and trainee.

Our interest was to gather data on some of the basic questions developed in the theoretical literature, toward the goal of improving our training practices. Specifically, we asked:

a) What supervisor characteristics are related to trainees' perceptions of high quality supervision?

b) What trainee characteristics result in high evaluation by supervisors?

c) Is there evidence of a "match" between supervisor and trainee such that there is a positive correlation between ratings across the dyadic pairs?

Methods: Our subjects were 40 pairs of trainees and supervisors, representing a pool of seven psychology interns and 16 faculty members. All interns were in the APA approved clinical psychology internship program at the NYU-Bellevue Medical Center. All supervisors were experienced clinicians and members of the NYU Medical School faculty. Most pairs met weekly for supervision of psychodynamically oriented psychotherapy with high functioning adult outpatients. Three

pairs were involved in group supervision, and for ten pairs the approach was short-term and directive.

Data were gathered by means of evaluation forms, designed as part of the study. Surveys were conducted among supervisors and trainees to determine the dimensions to be included in the evaluation forms. Suggestions from the surveys regarding the characteristics related to effective supervision and learning of therapy were compiled into two evaluation forms as follows:

FORM T: The trainee member of each supervisory pair was asked to rate his/her supervisor with respect to each of the characteristics below:

1. Availability for supervision.
2. Flexibility in theoretical approaches.
3. Responsiveness to intern's interests and needs when providing training opportunities.
4. Skill at conceptualizing clinical/treatment issues.
5. Guidance to relevant literature.
6. Willingenss to incorporate the trainee's point of view.

FORM S: The supervisor member of each pair was asked to rate the intern with respect to each of the attributes below:

1. Openness to new theoretical approaches.
2. Effectiveness at conceptualizing clinical/treatment issues.
3. Effectiveness at delivering psychotherapy to patients.
4. Familiarity with the literature relevant to patient issues.
5. Responsiveness to supervisor's suggestions (i.e. ability to implement supervisory input).
6. Willingness to consider his/her own issues as they interfere with service delivery.

Both forms also contained an "overall" rating for each person evaluated. The intern member of each supervision pair was provided with a FORM T and the supervisor was provided with a FORM S. The subjects were instructed to fill out the forms by assigning a rating from 1 to 7 (with extremes specified) for each characteristic.

Thus each form contained an overall rating, three dimensions related to the individual's level of skills in relation to clinical and academic issues (attributes 2, 4 and 5 on FORM T, and attributes 2, 3 and 4 on FORM S) and three dimensions related to issues of relationship between trainee and supervisor. The skill variables would seem to be more relevant in the acquisition of technique. We were particularly interested in the relative correlation to the overall rating of the skill variables vs. the relationship variables, because of the suggestion from the literature that the latter are more important in the experience of advanced trainees (Gaoni and Neumann, 1974).

Evaluations were gathered at the end of a ten month relationship between trainees and supervisors. Product moment correlations were computed for a) the individual dimensions on each scale with the overall rating on each scale; and b) the overall rating of the supervisor with the overall rating of the trainee in the supervisory pairs.

Results:
The following correlations were obtained between dimensions on FORM T and the criterion (overall rating of supervisor):

		r
1.	available	.76*
2.	flexible	-.24
3.	responsive to interests	.93*
4.	skilful at conceptualization	.79*
5.	guides to literature	-.45*
6.	incorporates trainees' viewpoint	.24

* significant at .05 level.

Four scales on FORM T were significantly correlated with the criterion. The highest correlation was obtained for supervisor's responsiveness to the trainee's needs and interests, followed by the supervisor's skills in conceptualizing issues, and his/her availability to the supervisee. A negative correlation was obtained between rating of overall quality of supervision, and the supervisor's tendency to guide the trainee to the literature! Correlation between the criterion and the trainee's rating of the supervisor's flexibility in theoretical approaches was also negative, but this did not reach significance.

The following correlations were obtained between dimensions on FORM S and the criterion (overall rating of trainee):

		r
1.	open to new approaches	.68*
2.	effective at conceptualizing	.59*
3.	effective at therapy delivery	.59*
4.	familiar with literature	.22
5.	responsive to suggestions	.53*
6.	open to considering own issues	.68*

* significant at .05 level.

On FORM S, five correlations were significant. The highest correlation to the criterion was obtained for the supervisor's perception of the trainee's openness to new approaches, and his/her willingness to examine personal issues as they affect treatment. Skill at conceptualizing treatment issues and delivering therapy were somewhat less correlated with the overall rating, followed by responsiveness to supervision. The supervisor's rating of the trainee's familiarity with the literature was insignificantly correlated with the overall rating.

The correlation between the criterion variable on FORM T (overall rating of supervisor) and the criterion variable on FORM S (overall rating of trainee), was highly significant, with r= .92.

Discussion: What are the most important qualities of the supervisor as indicated by the interns in our subject pool? Our trainees rate those supervisors who are most responsive to their particular interests and needs, most available and highly skilled in conceptual issues, the most highly. Two of these qualities have to do with the nature of the relationship established between supervisor in trainee (i.e. they are independent of skill variables), and one is related to the supervisor's skill independent of the relationship. This finding suggests that for trainees at the internship level, the structure of the relationship they establish with a supervisor plays a greater role in the quality of their supervisory experience than do the supervisor's skills alone.

An uexpected finding was that a skill generally believed to be related to good supervision, i.e. the supervisor's willingness to guide the trainee to the relevant clinical literature, was significantly negatively correlated with the rating of the supervisor. There are several possible explanations for this finding. Suggestions for readings, and the discussion of these readings may take up time during the supervisory session that the trainee feels would be more fruitfully spent in direct discussion of clinical issues. Reading assignments may be more appropriate for trainees at a different level of development as clinicians, i.e. novices who may need more of a didactic approach. Another possibility is that a supervisor may direct a trainee to readings when he/she feels insecure and in need of external authority. Thus the direction to readings may reflect a poor working relationship more frequently than it accompanies a good one. This possibility is supported by the high correlation (.74) between guidance to readings by the supervisor as rated by the trainee, and that supervisor's rating of the trainee.

The inverse correlation of overall rating with perception of the supervisor's flexibility in theoretical approaches was a surprise finding, even though it does not quite reach significance. This suggests that our subject pool tends to rate the purist supervisor more highly than the eclectic one. Supervisors on the other hand, give high evaluations to the flexible trainee.

Supervisors give high evaluations to the trainee who is aware of and willing to discuss his/her reactions to the patient. Present level of development of skills in the conceptualiztion and treatment of patients are given less importance, as is the ability to follow specific supervisory suggestion. As with the trainees, the supervisors tend to emphasize relationship variables more heavily than skills.

We received confirmation that some trainees do better than others with the same supervisor, and this is a result of their interaction rather than due to any member of the pair alone. This suggests that it would be worthwhile to explore the ingredients that make for a good match, and use them to assign supervisors to interns.

Our data suggest that our dyadic pairs are moving towards the stage where the focus is less didactic and more on the supervisee's reactions to their patients. Relationship variables predominate in evaluation of the supervisory experience from both the supervisor's and the trainee's point of view. At the same time, trainees feel that they learn best from supervisors who are clear about their models rather than those who borrow from different paradigms.

Greenberg has indicated that attention to the supervisee's perspective is essential in the training relationship. Our sample suggests that particular aspects of an intern's perspective are more important to attend to than others to make a good learning experience for the trainee. Trainee's appreciate an interest in meeting specific needs and interests, but they do not feel that attempts to incorporate a trainee's point of view regarding the patient is as important in making a positive experience.

Our data provide support for Hess' (1980) suggestion that supervision is essentially dyadic human interaction. Individuals hold different models of psychotherapy. Where the models match, a trainee and supervisor can "work together and help each other grow". Where different agendas and goals predominate, an impasse results. Trainees appreciate attention paid to their particular interests and needs, but the experience is not negatively affected when the supervisor is committed to a model. Our data provide some hints as to how the possible impasse between trainee and supervisor is avoided: Trainees prefer purist supervisors and supervisors prefer flexible trainees.

This paper reports on a pilot study intended to elucidate some of the issues in the empirical study of the supervisory relationship. Certainly the sample size is small, and the methodology could be further refined. We are in the process of conducting a larger scale study, designed to investigate some of the hypotheses suggested by this pilot.

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